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TESTIMONY OF RABBI HAROLD BERNSTEIN
Education Committee Public Hearing, March 2, 2016

Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischman and Members of the Education Committee. I am the Dean of Bi-Cultural Day School, a private, not for profit, elementary and middle school located in Stamford, CT serving the educational, cultural and religious needs of the greater Stamford Jewish community. Bi-Cultural is proud to be celebrating its 60th birthday this year, with a current enrollment of 336 students ranging from pre-Kindergarten to 8th Grade.

I am here today to offer testimony in support of General Assembly S.B Bill No. 318 (Raised), An Act Concerning Private School Transportation, which has been referred to the Committee on Education for Public Hearing today. Specifically, we support the Bill's proposed addition to the language currently stated in Connecticut General Statutes sec. 10-280 which states, "any local or regional board of education that provides transportation pursuant to this section shall be reimbursed for the cost of such student transportation annually, in the manner described in section 10-281." We believe that this additional mandate will further ensure and promote the policy that children attending non-public schools will ride to and from school under the same safe and reliable conditions as students transported to public schools. We feel this language is necessary, because:

- a) Although the current statute, 10-280a permits a municipal board of education to provide transportation to students of schools such as Bi-Cultural who reside outside the school district where the school is located, without reimbursement it is highly unlikely that any municipality, or at least the City of Stamford, will ever do so, rendering the above stated purpose and benefit of C.G.S. 10-281 and 10-280a moot; and
- b) the inability of parents residing outside of the district where the school is located to obtain the same transportation made available to public school students will result in additional congestion on the local highways and routes to and from schools during rush hour traffic and create driving conditions that are less safe for the students travelling to and from School.

In the case of Bi Cultural Day School, we currently have 46 students who travel to and from Stamford each day from the towns of Cos Cob, Greenwich, Old Greenwich, Riverside, Fairfield, Danbury, New Canaan, Norwalk, Ridgefield, Weston, and Westport. These students currently travel by means of 3 buses that make four stops between

them – a private parking lot in Greenwich for students travelling from the South of Stamford and 3 commuter parking lot stops located, respectively, at exits 41, 42 and 44 of the Merritt Parkway, for those students from the North of Stamford. These buses are currently paid for by the School at a total cost of approximately \$129,000.00.

In the case of Bi-Cultural, the cost of this bus transportation is heading toward unsustainability and the parents of the students who benefit from this transportation service cannot afford to pick up the cost thereof. If the school is forced to discontinue underwriting the bus service currently provided, the parents of the 46 students will be forced to drive their children to and from school themselves. We submit that this is not as safe a method of travel as bus transportation, particularly during the winter months. To quote Justice McDonald of the Connecticut Supreme Court, "The bright yellow school bus with its flashing red lights is a symbol of safe and reliable transportation."

Furthermore, parents driving their children to school, in the case of Bi-Cultural alone, will add 15-22 vehicles during rush hour traffic to and from school each day, on a small stretch of the Merritt parkway. We believe that, together with other private schools that currently are or will be in a similar predicament as Bi-Cultural Day School state-wide, significant traffic can be alleviated by use of school buses to transport the students of the affected schools and a substantial number of students will be more safely transported.

By reason of the foregoing, we urge the committee to recommend approval of Raised Bill No. 318. We thank you for your kind consideration of our request.

Very Truly Yours

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Tzvi Bernstein', with a stylized, flowing script.

Tzvi Bernstein